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ABSTRACT

The increasing occupation of journals with the subject of political persuasion is briefly surveyed. A set of principles which might be utilized to reconceive an inventional theory are proposed, and means through which these principles may be applied in studies of political persuasion are suggested. The decision to shift from a speaker/message situation ultimately depends on the particular communications theory adhered to. If one accepts the proposition that audiences are flagrantly active determinants of meaning, it may well be time to shift from the single-speaker to the message/system approach. (EE)

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# POLITICAL PERSUASION--MODERNIZING OUR THEORY OF INVENTION

James W. Chesebro

Political persuasion is increasingly accepted as an area of study within speech-communication. In 1937, the Quarterly Journal of Speech published its first article dealing with a contemporary political persuader. The journal gradually devoted greater attention to contemporary political persuaders. In 1948, QJS formally recognized its concern for contemporary political persuasion by commiting itself to the analysis of Presidential campaigns every four years. In 1969, Harold D. Lasswell and Satish K. Arora's book, Political Communication, signalled the respect paid to the theories, methods, and research findings of rhetoricians interested in contemporary political persuasion. L. Patrick Devlin's 1971 book, Contemporary Political Speaking, reflected the existence of political persuasion courses in speech-communication curriculums.

While studies of contemporary political persuasion are now common, many of us examining political persuaders have found the traditional theory of invention increasingly difficult to use. That such difficulty should emerge is not surprising. A theory of invention should evolve and change just as any social system must change over time. We expect that a theory of invention is grounded, not only upon enduring and stable dimensions of human behavior, but also accounts for the changing and telic nature of the human experience. In this context, Elbert Harrington noted some ten years ago in his article, "A Modern Approach to Invention," that "Each generation of rhetoricians must examine anew the concept of rhetorical invention."[1] From this perspective, let me initially suggest some of the major difficulties

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with the traditional theory of invention that the rhetorician specializing in political persuasion faces.

First, traditional theory tends to view the inventional process as a method of recalling common experiences rather than as the discovery of unique experiences. To view the inventional process solely as the recall of the common is, in one way, to deny the generative and heuristic functions implied in the term invention. As the Report of the Committee on the Nature of Rhetorical Invention noted in The Prospect of Rhetoric, "most conventional treatments of rhetorical invention. . .assume that the inventional process is more the discovery of already existing facts than the actual discovery of facts and creative solutions."[2] In this regard, it is assumed that reality is relatively static, that our culture is relatively cohesive and unified, and that all conflicts can be resolved through appeals to common ground with a consensus model functioning as the primary and more useful mode for viewing symbolic interactions. For those studying political persuasion, to view the inventional process as only the recall of the common, is to discourage the development of theories and methods which examine the unique and diverse experiences which are increasingly controlling contemporary political interactions. The Black Power Movement and Women's Liberation Movement, for example, would seem to require that we study uncommon inventional processes. Psychologists and sociologists have detected a cultural bias in I.Q. tests. It may now be time for members of this profession to seriously consider the possibility that the prescriptions offered for invention reflect the perceptual bias of white, liberal, middle-class, middle-aged heterosexual males.

Second, traditional inventional theory tends to distinguish the invent-

ional process from arrangement and style. McCroskey and Knapp have already noted that "Traditionally rhetorical literature has reflected a distinct separation of inventio and disposito."[3] They conclude their study by arguing that "a complete dichtomization of inventio and dispositio is theoretically unsound and pedagogically impractical."[4] For those studying political persuasion, the tendency to separate invention from organization and style discourages the examination of the broad world-views which dominate and generate ideas affecting the ongoing process. The assumption operating here is that the concept of a world-view could function as one of the few synthetic and critical rhetorical concepts unifying and necessarily identifying the interrelationships among invention, organization, and style. Put yet another way, the concept of a world-view allows us to simultaneously deal with invention, organizational patterns, and rhetorical strategies in a unified and coherent fashion. Insofar as tradition continues to highlight the differences between invention, organization, and style, those studying political persuasion will continue to find it extremely difficult to examine those world-views which seem to dominate political interactions. For example, we may decide that it is appropriate to view Stokely Carmichael as a product of the Civil Rights movement, spokesperson for the Black Power movement, and forerunner of the Black Revolution. Using traditional inventional theory, a rhetorician would find it extremely difficult to integrate the cultural and strategic implications of such a critical observation about Carmichael even though the rhetorician may be sure that such concerns are legitimately part of a discussion of the inventional process defining Carmichael's speeches. In this regard, The Prospect of Rhetoric does recommend:

> That programs of research be encoraged which will examine the rhetorical resources peculiar to and common to world views.

> Priority should be assigned to investigating the connection between different life styles and soical organizations on one hand, and different world views on the other.[5]

Finally, let me suggest that traditional inventional theory is tied to sets of prescriptions for the single or individual speaker. As Robert L. Scott has argued:

> Invention is not a personal power. The Romans divided rhetoric into three parts: the powers of the speaker, the speech, and the speech situation. Invention was treated as a power of the speaker. This bias has clung to the notion through the centuries that have followed.

Scott concludes that the single-speaker-centered conception of invention "simply will not work, that is, it will not account for the dynamic qualities of human communication, and may mislead us most perniciously."[6] In terms of communication theory, then, a single-speaker-centered inventional conception tends to view the audience as passive and deny the dynamics of the communication process.

For those stydying political communication, a single-speaker-centered inventional theory simply precludes examining the predominate forms of political interaction such as campaigns, movements, and the mass media. Consider, just briefly, the problems produced by a single-speaker-centered theory if a rhetorician is examining the 1972 Presidential candidacy of Richard Nixon. If Nixon had campaigned and if his speeches had defined the rhetorical environment, traditional inventional theory would allow a rhetorician to deal adequately with the Nixon candidacy. However, the Nixon strategy was to employ a host of speakers including PatriciaNixon, Julie Eisenhower, John Connolly, Henry Kissinger, Ron Ziegler and "leaks" from the White House and Pentagon. These speakers more clearly defined the meaning of the Nixon candidacy.

Similarly, in studying movements, the single-speaker-centered inventional theory is not designed to deal with genres of speakers. Women's Liberation, for example, appears to be structured to preclude the emergence of a single speaker in the traditional meaning of the word. The speakers for the movement are either "spokespersons" reading a group statement or are condemned as "superstars" if they speak as an independent for the entire movement. In this case, the critic would most likely want to deal with the inventional process affecting the group's message, not the spokesperson who happens to be reading the group statement. However, traditional inventional theory is simply not structured to deal with a single statement representing a group of speakers. But the problem is not unique to the study of campaigns and movements.

Seldom do audiences hear only one speaker on a given political issue. The mass media has allowed--if not forced--audiences to interact with groups of speakers representing all of the various positions on a given issue at virtually the same time. On the issue of busing to secure school integration, for example, several representatives of the black community, liberals, conservatives, and independents may confront us on Walter Cronkite, especially if the reporter is offering an "indepth" analysis. To do an extensive analysis of the inventional process of only one of the speakers who appear on such a program would seem to bypass the extremely rich and dynamic communication process the audience has experienced. As a modification of the traditional theory, one might suggest that the rhetorician examine the inventional process of each of the speaker who appear on such a program. However, such a recommendation fails to grapple with the central issue. <u>It is the interactions among groups of speakers that generate the ideas</u>

which captivate both audience and rhetorician. Of course, the mass media itself denies the usefulness of recommending that the single speaker use the characteristics of the audience as a guide for the selection of idea--the media creates a "mass audience." It would seem, then, that insofar as traditional inventional theory is tied to the examination of a single speaker, rhetoricians are hard pressed to deal with the kinds of inventional issues generated by campaigns, movements and the mass media. For rhetoricians studying political persuaders such an observation is overpowering. Predominately, political speaking now occurs as part of a campaign, movement, or in the context of the mass media.

If we are, then, to reconceive inventional theory, what directions might rhetoricians move in? Obviously, I would recommend that whatever theory is devised, the theory allow rhetoricians to view the inventional process as:

1. A creative process of finding new facts and new solutions;

2. A defining component of larger sociocultural world-views in which the intimate relationships between invention, organization, and style are recognized; and

3. Message and situation centered. Given the time limitations of this situation, I will only briefly outline how these principles might function as the function as the foundation for a theory of invention for only the study of political persuasion. I will identify particular methods which would allow a rhetorician to reconceive inventional theory although other rhetoricians could appropriately implement or operationalize these principles in any number of alternative ways. At this point, then, I begin to operate from a more esoteric set of preferences hoping that my particular application might function

as a representative example of how inventional theory might be reconceived and heuristically as a stimulus for other reconceptions of inventional theory.

In reconceiving an inventional theory for political persuasion, I begin with the assumption that both: (1) the subtance or policy itself of political acts and (2) the strategies used to justify and gain acceptance of policies are both the proper concerns of the rhetorician. In this view, the substance of the policy itself and the strategies used to justify the policy are mutally related and jointly account for the meaning and persuasiveness of political speaking. Employing terms I have already used, I am simply noting that persuasion is a function of both the message and the way the message is adapted to the rhetorical situation. Given this view, let me first suggest how a message-centered inventional rather than a single speaker theory might be devised.

In proposing a message-centered inventional theory, the critic's attention turns to the formal messages themselves or to "discourse that is propositional--that is, formed from complete thoughts, with the sentence as its basic unit."[7] The primary effort is, then, to classify political discourse which are similar in kind. Generally, as rhetoricians begin to classify discourse, they employ a method typically identified as a "generic" approach. The decision to identify major genres of discourse requires that isolated speakers and specific audiences be de-emphasized; the rhetorician shifts to a higher level of abstraction focusing upon the similarities and differences among major groups of rhetorical discourse. In message-centered genres, discourse classified in a given genre must possess similar content and form. As Karlyn Campbell has aptly noted,

discourse within a given rhetorical genre must "share basic stylistic and philosophical judgments that unify them in a rheyorical genre."[8]

In limiting my attention solely to political discourse at this point, a genre scheme has been developed which seems extremely useful for a message-centered theory of invention. Both politicians and rhetoricians often classify discourse as radical, liberal, conservative, or reactionary. These political labels can effectively function as the entitlement terms for an inventional theory for political persuasion. Bernard.L. Brock has already used the terms extensively with the primary effort of defining the four political positions, identifying the kinds of policies unique to each position, and the stylistic and strategic characteristics unique to each position.[9] While I cannot summarize all of Brock's research here, let me offer a summary of his work with the radical. In terms of the substance of their discourse, Brock found that the radical policies uniquely sought to extend the drift of society by destroying existing social institutions. In terms of the style of their discourse, he found that radicals universally and uniquely argue from means, employ detailed treatments of cure and cost, and persistently use an extremely active style. Brock results are based upon an examination of political discourse over a 200 year period covering both national and international issues. The substantive and stylistic characteristics he attributes to each of the four political positions are also confirmed by Richard Hofstadler and the President's Commission on Campus Unrest.[10] Moreover, the radical-liberal-conservative-reactionary scheme allows the rhetorician to view the inventional process as both a way of recalling the kinds of policies and strategies of different world-views while also functioning as world-views which change and generate new policies and strategies

appropriate to the immediate sociocultural environment. There would appear to be, then, good reasons to consider the radical-liberal-conservative-reactionary genres as viable candidates for a message-centered theory of rhetorical invention.

Having proposed a message-centered inventional theory, one is still left with the question of how a given message is justified and gains acceptance in a given situation. If one begins with the assumption that rhetorical situations are flagrantly unpredictable environments, then the method used to identify the rhetorical factors accounting for communication outcomes must be extremely comprehensive. Obviously, an extremely large number of methods exist which purport to identify the major factors controlling communication outcomes. It seems to me that Kenneth Burke's pentadic factors can be modified and used as a basic point of departure. In this regard, the image of the group (the agents), the particular constraints of the situation (the scent), the strategies used (the agencies), the message itself (the act), and the intent of the group (the purpose) determine communication outcomes. Each of these pentadic factors constitute major research areas within political communication right now. In addition, David Ling's "A Pentadic Analysis of Senator Edward Kennedy's Address to the People of Massachusetts, July 25, 1969" suggests that this dramatistic method can be effectively used to generate insights regarding political interactions.[11] As inventional theory shifts, then, from a single-speaker-centered approach to a message-and-situation-centered appraoch, it would appear thet methods already exist which would allow the rhetorician to reconceive the inventional process in more dynamic and comprehensive ways. In addition, these methods would seem to allow the rhetorician to treat the inventional process as a process intimately related to organization and style as reflected in world-views.

## Conclusion

I have sought, then, to offer some reasons why rhetoricians specializing in political persuasion have found difficulty with the traditional inventional theory. I have proposed a set of principles which might be used to reconceive an inventional theory, and have suggested how those principles might be applied in studies of political persuasion. The decision to actually shift from a speaker to message/situation inventional theory will ultimately depend upon what theory of communication we hold. If we believe the speaker controls the communication process, little motive exists for shifting the current approach. If we believe, however, that audiences are flagrantly active determinants of meaning, it may well be time to shift from the single-speaker to message/situation approach. While we may not be pleased with all of the choices made here, at least I hope we agree that traditional inventional theory must be reconceived.

## Notes

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[1]QJS, XLVIII (December 1962), p. 373.

[2]"Report of the Committee on the Nature of Rhetorical Invention," The Prospect of Rhetoric, ed. by Lloyd F. Bitzer and Edwin Black (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, 1971), p. 229.

[3]Mark L. Knapp and James C. McCroskey, "The Siamese Twins: Inventio and Dispositio," Today's Speech, XIV (April 1966), p. 17.

[4]Ibid.

[5]"Report of the Committee. . .," p. 236.

[6]Robert L. Scott, "Reconceiving Rhetoric: A Report on the National Development Conference on Rhetoric," presented to the 60th Annual Meeting of the National Council of Teachers of English, Atlanta, Georgia, November 27, 1970.

[7]Karlyn Kohrs Campbell, Critiques of Contemporary Rhetoric (Belmont, California: Wadsworth Publishing Company, Inc., 1972), p. 2.

[8]Ibid., p. 37.

[9]Bernard L. Brock, "A Definition of the Four Political Positions and a Description of their Rhetorical Characteristics," unpublished Ph.D. dissertation (Northwestern University, 1965).

[10]Richard Hofstadter, The American Political Tradition (New York: Vintage/Random House, 1948); Report of the President's Commission on Campus Unrest (New York: Discus, 1971), p. 19.

[11]The Central States Speech Journal, XXI (Summer 1970). pgs. 81-86.